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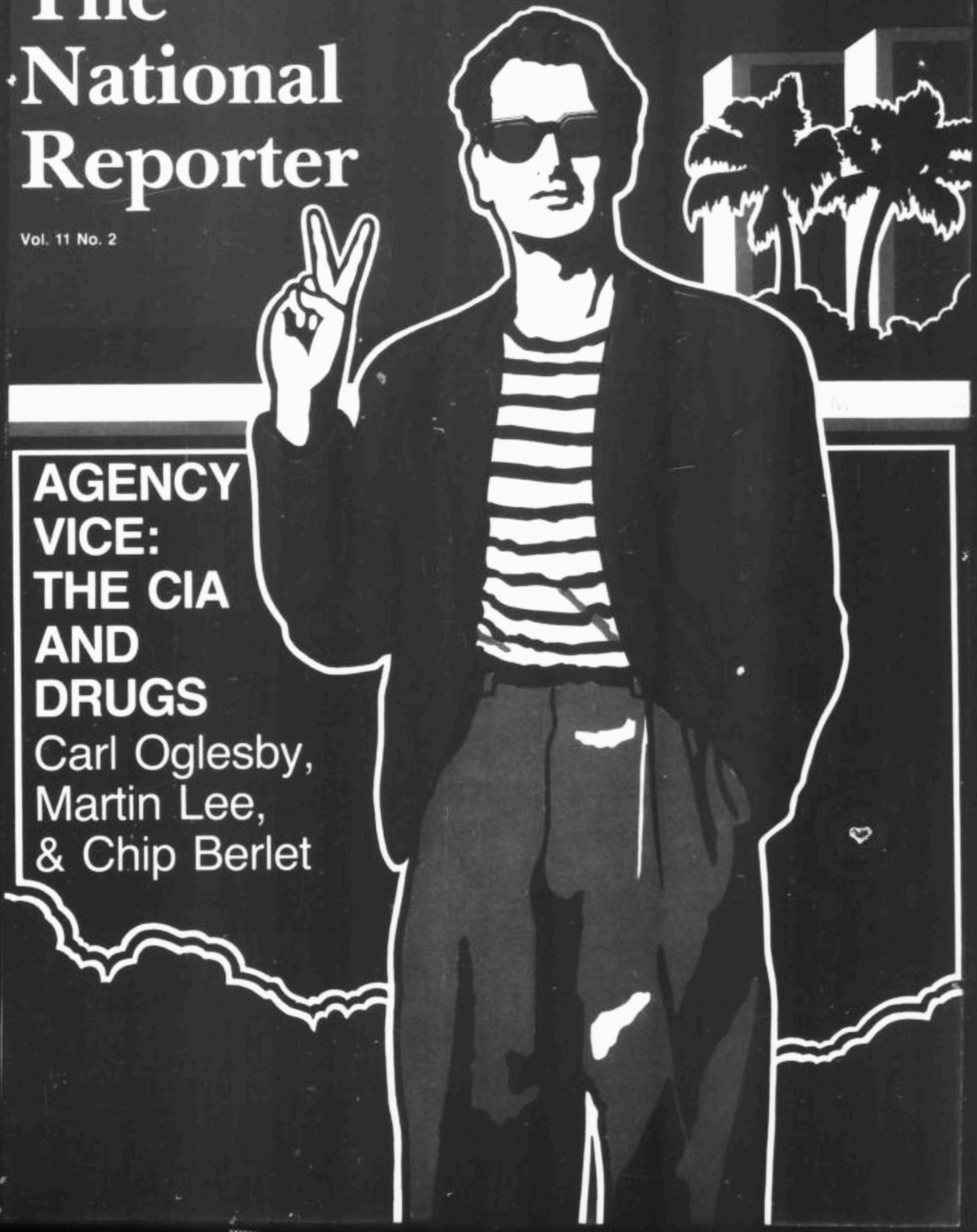

AGENCY VICE: THE CIA AND DRUGS

Carl Oglesby, Martin Lee, & Chip Berlet

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IN THIS ISSUE

This issue of *The National Reporter* is organized around three related themes: drugs; the CIA; and the corporate media that prefer not to link the first two of these terms in the same sentence — or same four-second soundbite.

Daniel Brandt, creator of SpyBASE, contributes our lead editorial. Brandt reviews the history of the *CounterSpy* project from its inception, and rejects the now-familiar view that U.S. society must defend itself against the handful of investigative journalists who were willing, or who remain willing, to name official names. In fact, Brandt argues, the more plausible threat to democratic values continues to be the self-interested lethargy with which the mainstream media have underreported the story of the covert state.

Carl Oglesby's review-essay on Lee and Shlain's *Acid Dreams* reminds us of some strange alliances already on the public record. It's known, for example, that U.S. intelligence agencies were the principal financial angels behind LSD research worldwide. It's known they were looking for a "truth serum," and for drugs that would make it possible to tear down, and reconfigure, the human psyche. It's reasonable to suppose they got more than they bargained for. But how much more? Oglesby concludes his tribute to Lee and Shlain's remarkable book by considering the possibility that the great American acid trip "was begun as a ruse of the counter-revolution."

If so, one key figure was the late Ronald Stark, the Rasputin of LSD. For this issue of *NR*, **Martin A. Lee** updates the portrait of Stark that appears in *Acid Dreams*. The multilingual Stark was a genius confidence man on a grand, transnational scale. But he also delivered on many of his claims. His Belgian drug lab, for example, produced over twenty kilos of LSD — the equivalent of 50 million doses, much of it peddled to the U.S. counterculture. Even as he mingled promiscuously with every kind of extreme political tendency, Stark seemed to enjoy the kind of charmed life most often led by agents under the protection of state authority.

Stark took secrets with him to the grave.

For his part, **Chip Berlet** is interested in the oblivion that has overtaken a number of once-famous stories from the 1960s and 1970s — starting with the Southeast Asia CIA-heroin connection that Berlet himself helped get on the wire. Blending memoir and analysis, Berlet recalls the theory, practice, and occasional glories of the U.S. "underground" press. He also sketches a theory of why so many of today's potentially-explosive stories seem to drop between the jumpcuts, and expensive haircuts, of the contemporary media biz.

Norman Solomon picks up this theme in his account of the media-watchdog group FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting). In the Wonderland rose-garden of the major media, the sour neoconservative blather of a routine *Post* op-ed page passes for "liberalism." For "conservatism," one must drain the bitter dregs of the Mad Hatters over at Accuracy in Media, official greeters at the long-running Reagan tea party. FAIR has some different ideas, and their work deserves everyone's support.

In his second essay in this issue, **Carl Oglesby** reflects on the hawks, doves, and media stormy petrels who flocked to Tufts University recently to confer on "Covert Action and Democracy." We're fortunate that someone with Oglesby's remarkable literary gifts was present when Daniel Ellsberg and William Colby faced each other across the seminar table. But we're also lucky to have Oglesby's searching critique of the philosophy of the covert state — the topic the Tufts conferees couldn't seem to get on the table at all. An essay of hard-won insights, lucidly dispensed.

In their pointed essay, **John Cavanaugh** and **Frederick Clairmonte** answer a rash of U.S. media accounts of a national economy whose "leading indicators" point sharply up. Despite its real strengths, they argue, the U.S. economy is being victimized by its "own" transnationals, a debt binge, and falling productivity. Up the road, they see contraction, and a U.S. state less able to dictate to the world. Their analysis is closely reasoned, but don't expect to see panelists chewing over it tonight on CNN's "Moneyline."

— Steve Badrich

LITTLE MAGAZINES MAY COME

AND GO...

"And do not forget the petty scoundrels in this regime; note their names, so that none will go free! They should not find it possible, having had their part in these abominable crimes, at the last minute to rally to another flag and then act as if nothing had happened!"

— From the fourth leaflet of the White Rose resistance in Germany, 1942. Five students and a professor who wrote and distributed the leaflets were executed in 1943.

"The CIA, the State Department, and U.S. Army intelligence each created special programs for the specific purpose of bringing selected former Nazis and collaborators to the United States.... The government employed these men and women for their expertise in propaganda and psychological warfare, for work in American laboratories, and even as special guerrilla troops for deployment inside the USSR in the midst of a nuclear war.... Hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of such recruits were SS veterans; some had been officers of the bloody Sicherheitsdienst (SD), the Nazi party's security service."

— Christopher Simpson, *Blowback*, 1988

BY DANIEL BRANDT

The suspension of publication after fifteen years has a way of betraying an editor's penchant for reflection. This is particularly true when the publication is *CounterSpy / The National Reporter*, whose history is a microcosm within a larger context that began in the sixties and now tries vainly to see its reflection in the campaign of 1988. If we've learned anything over the years, it's that there are a lot of powerful people who won't be sad to see us go. It may be worthwhile to review our own history and point of view for the record, which too often has been trampled by the mass media.

We suspend publication not because the issues are less real or less vital, but simply because survival in this form is more trouble than it's worth. There seem to be fewer lumps in the cultural stew these days, and that makes it more difficult for zero-budget publishing. Apart from an occasional smoking-gun hunt on news at eleven that promises spice and titillation, if not historical perspective, the information industry is satisfied with the latest expert from the Heritage Foundation or the Center for Strategic and International Studies. In a culture where the McMedium is the message, alternative journals find it hard to survive.

Meanwhile, back at Reagan's ranch, one wonders if the Sandinistas can survive eight more years of Bushwhacking from an expanded U.S. intelligence apparatus whose tactics often resemble those of drug-running Mafia kingpins. And whether, despite an economy that has increasingly marginalized millions but has yet to spur an impetus for reform, certain expressions of counter-analysis — similar in spirit to *CS/NR* if not in form — can continue to emerge and survive.

CounterSpy can trace its roots to Norman Mailer's 50th birthday party in 1973, when he donated funds to start The Organizing Committee for a Fifth Estate. Several of the early editors were veterans of U.S. military intelligence in Vietnam. They began publishing some names of CIA agents around the world, after which the IRS withdrew their tax-exempt status and went after Mailer's property.

Life at the counter-publishing barricades went from bad to worse during Bush's tenure at the CIA, when a sustained disinformation campaign was apparently launched at the highest levels in the wake of Richard Welch's assassination in Athens at the end of 1975. Despite the fact that Welch had been identified as a CIA officer apart from *CounterSpy*, the coincidence

was too convenient for the disinformationists to ignore. Needless to say, the historical context was also ignored — there was no discussion in mainstream media of CIA involvement in the overthrow of Greek democracy in 1967. *CounterSpy* was trying to say that CIA officers ought to be accountable under the law just like the rest of us, but there can be no accountability when individuals remain unidentified. The concept is obvious enough, but media pressure on *CounterSpy* caused it to cease publication for a time.

Ellen Ray, one of the early *CounterSpy* staffers, along with Bill Schaap and Louis Wolf, formed *CovertAction Information Bulletin* in 1978. *CounterSpy* resumed under the co-editorship of John Kelly and Konrad Ege. Both publications continued to devote a few pages each issue to naming names, while the disinformation campaign successfully shifted the focus of mainstream media from what the CIA was doing around the world to the impending Intelligence Identities Protection Act, finally passed overwhelmingly by Congress and signed by Reagan in 1982.

Much of the media fixation focused on Philip Agee, whose *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* was published in 1975. He contributed articles to both the early *CounterSpy* and later to *CAIB*. Even today the mere mention of Agee raises a red flag for supporters of U.S. covert action, although he had nothing to do with naming Welch and has not named anyone since the 1970s. When asked in June 1987 how he felt about Agee returning to the U.S. for the first time in nearly twenty years, vice-president George Bush was visibly angered and used words like "disgraceful" and "despicable," saying that he had "nothing but disdain for Philip Agee."

As *CSINR* again suspends publication, this time for different reasons, we note that next to Richard Welch's name in our infamous 1975 issue was one Joseph F. Fernandez. Also known as "Tomas Castillo," Fernandez was indicted this year for crimes committed in his official capacity as station chief in Costa Rica. He contends, and we have no reason to doubt him, that he was following orders. The question is whether this excuses his actions.

Apparently the *Washington Post*, for one, feels that it does, because they refused to print his name for over a year, up until the day his indictment was announced. Fortunately most other major media felt differently about the issue and used his real name. This undoubtedly increased the chances of an indictment, and consequently Fernandez vs. the American people will get their day in court. All *CounterSpy* ever wanted was accountability under the law, but what it got was a law that tries to preclude accountability.

In 1985 *CounterSpy* changed its name to *The National Reporter*, after Konrad Ege was no longer able to play an active role. John Kelly, who has had more scoops and cover stories over the years than the rest of us combined, is still our editor, though increasingly he is busy with other projects. For the past seven issues production has been managed by Rose Marie Audette in her spare time. Now that she is no longer active, the magazine is much more difficult to produce. No one can remember the last time we had an office, any paid staff, or any funding other than subscriptions and sales. It is with some relief that we suspend publication and re-channel our energies.

We will do our best to address these same issues in other forms; nothing else makes much sense. It amazes us that despite the huge stakes for other countries, as American activists we have hardly been asked to pay a price. This can be attributed to both our insular privileges as American citizens, and to the Constitutional principles — a bit eroded but still serviceable — that make the American ideal worthwhile.

Certainly others have paid the price. Since World War II, the task of preserving our Constitution has been warped and distorted under the agenda of national security. All too often a threat was perceived where none existed, and in the name of this perception we undermined the very principles were were trying to preserve. For the first twenty years it happened in secret, but since the sixties we have made significant progress in uncovering the historical record. Now that much of the evidence is in, the question is what to do about it.

A major part of the problem is that our economy is driven and sustained by the priorities of the security state. It is one thing to reconsider our priorities, and another entirely to retool an industry and retrain a working force. Yet something significant *is* within our reach, something whose economic implications will be negligible except for a few profiteering multinationals with old-boy intelligence connections. America needs to confront its own recent history as well as protect the interests of its citizens, and both can be accomplished by outlawing peacetime covert activity.

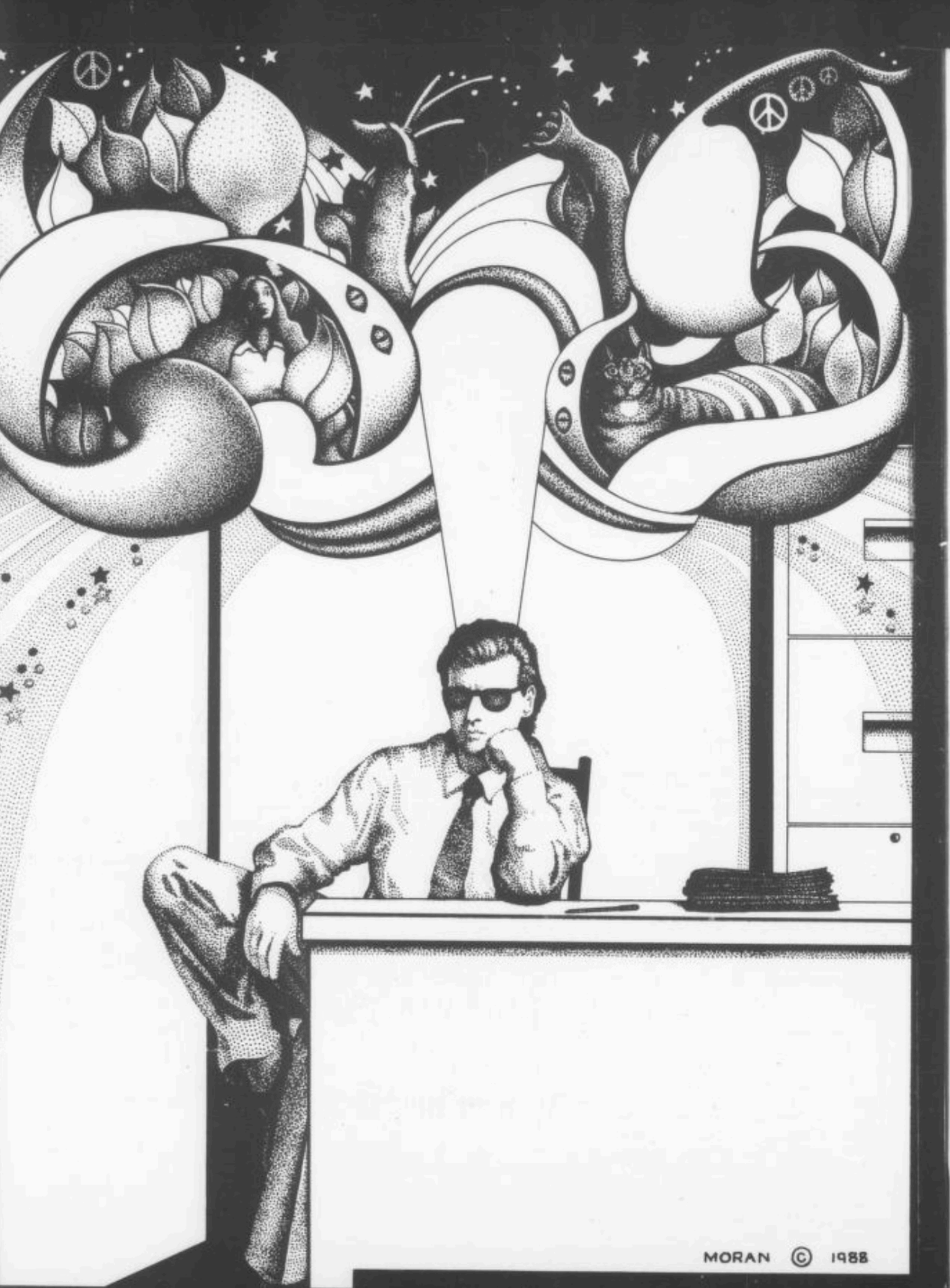
This would contribute more to the security of Americans than all the counter-terrorist proposals and elite strike forces that ever found their way onto Pentagon wish-lists. And it would protect the Richard Welches better than a hundred new anti-*CounterSpy* laws, because Welch could then be held legally accountable for crimes against other peoples.

It's much larger than the issue of whether the First Amendment gives *CounterSpy* the right to name CIA agents. The underground guerrilla group that assassinated Welch in 1975 has assassinated two American military officers since then, last year attacked two buses carrying American personnel, and may have also been behind two attacks on nightclubs, one of which injured 69 Americans in 1985. The group calls itself "November 17," named after the Athens Polytechnic uprising in 1973 which foreshadowed the ouster of the Greek junta the following year. Something happened to their country in 1967 that had to do with America, and it has kept these guerrillas angry for almost twenty years. Americans as a people are still paying the price they're determined to extract — even though most of us are blameless. Judging from polls, many Americans wouldn't even be able to find Greece on a map.

Others all around the world, and not just Greece, have felt the sting of our covert activities over the past forty years. Many of them are deeply bitter, and disinclined to draw what they see as insignificant distinctions between CIA officers and agents, military attachés, diplomats, American servicemen, or even American tourists. It is U.S. policy itself that threatens the American people, not magazines like *CounterSpy* that attempt to distinguish between the people and the policy-makers. By deflecting and distorting the issues the policy-makers manage to insulate themselves *at the expense* of the American people. The only cure is for the American people to dissociate from that policy.

There is no time and no need for any regrets over the suspension of publication. The most significant aspect to the *CounterSpy* saga is that almost all of those who have contributed over the past fifteen years continue today with similar efforts. Despite shallow *Newsweek* cover stories on the sixties, assigned by editors whose careers and consciousness were barely influenced by their subject-matter, there are thousands of us who know better. We can still distinguish between the interests of the American people, on the one hand, and the greed of multinational corporations and their handmaidens in U.S. intelligence on the other.

And as representatives of the former, we expect that the people of developing countries will make the same distinction, because we will continue to work with them to devise new and better methods to protect against the latter. Little magazines may come and go, but big ideas survive. □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THE ACID TEST AND HOW IT FAILED

BY CARL OGLESBY

Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD and the Sixties Rebellion. Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain. Grove Press (New York), 1985, 343 pp., ISBN 0-394-62081-X, $12.95 paper.

Something special about the 1960s inheres in the fact that, along with everything else that happened, there had to be the great American acid trip, too. History adds irony to caprice in decreeing that this apparently incidental and arbitrary embellishment should emerge as the main connecting theme of the entire period.

This is why I say no shelf on the sixties can be complete without Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain's *Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD and the Sixties Rebellion*. This book was widely and well noted when it first appeared. It spent several weeks on a San Francisco best-seller list. But in the unaccountable way with books that tell the truth about the on-going national intelligence scandal (Alfred McCoy's *Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* is the classic example), it never found the readers who could give its amazing disclosures a political thrust. CIA and Pentagon heads ought to have rolled because of *Acid Dreams*, but things seem to be much the way they were before.

Whatever the reason for that, one can say without fear of contradiction that no one understands the distinctive quality of political life in the '60s who does not know that the great acid trip was the creation of both the counter-culture *and* the secret state, of both the movement *and* the domestic contra, of forces both of liberation *and* repression acting in the antagonistic unity we call *the dialectic* to produce a field of actualities dominated by neither liberation nor repression but utterly the product of their conflict.

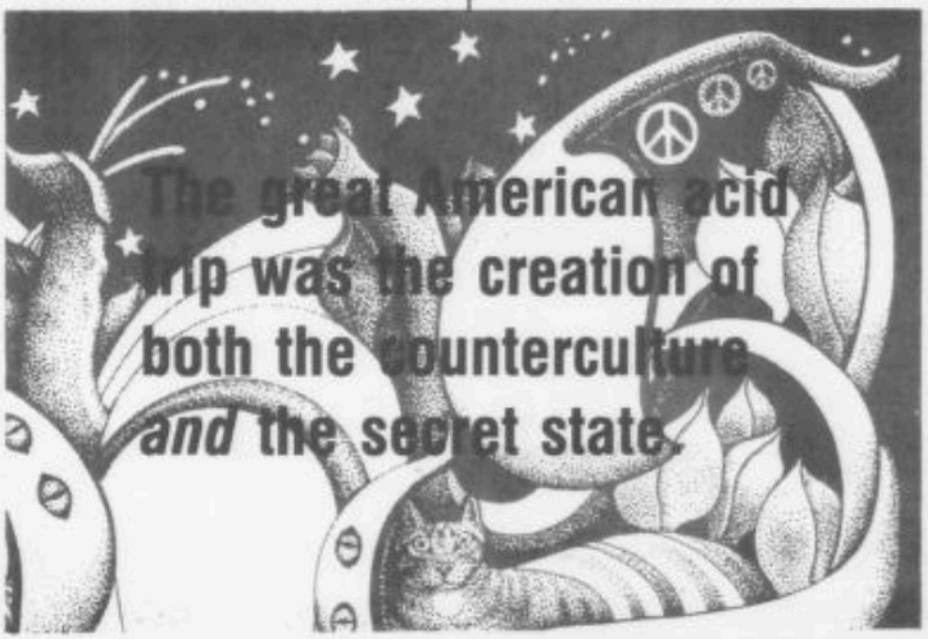
A fine sense of this central dialectic informs the Lee and Shlain work. The authors, both in their 30s, are sharply aware of the impact of acid (peyote, mescaline, etc.) on their own generation and on the lifestyle of dissent, on the movement's inner life, its self-image, its sense of the horizon.

The tension between chemical mysticism and critical politics gave rise to one of the great debates of the decade. The Old Left just said no, regarding any chemical intervention in consciousness as an obvious trap for the masses, a way to burn off an alienated energy that might otherwise find its way to the barricades.

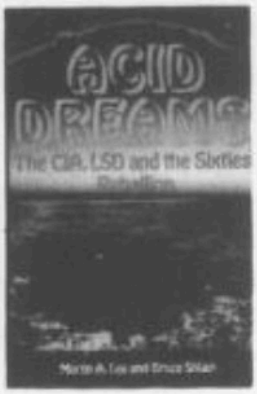
But the New Left saw something else in acid besides the opiation of potentially revolutionary workers. Most of us believed that acid was not like opium or heroin, that people were not taking it to dull their senses but to sharpen them, not in passivity but in a very definite spirit of rebellion, not to give in to the repressive in American culture but to pierce its illusions and, in the words of a Doors song that SDS took up as a slogan, to "break on through to the other side."

The cadres of the anti-war and civil-rights movement and those of the Woodstock or acid-rock generation were thus in a push-pull dialectic of their own, though generally moving in the same direction within the same broad social current. Acid rock adopted the political imagery of revolution easily and naturally because the revolutionary's sense of the creative, purposive disorder resonated so strongly with the tripper's sense of what LSD-25 was all about. The explicitly political movement hoped that the energy released by the acid-rock experience would break free of its containment vessel (the songfest, in our time called the rock concert) and spill over into the political society, as indeed it appeared to do in the late-sixties phenomenon of the "be-in."

This was the basis of a dynamic, unstable, but very workable and powerful alliance between the counter-culture and



"An engrossing account of a period...when a tiny psychoactive molecule affected almost every aspect of Western life"



—WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS

Based in part on thousands of pages of formerly classified government documents, *Acid Dreams* is at once an eye-opening account of the CIA's involvement in the use of LSD and a fascinating chronicle of the psychedelic counter-culture of the 60's.

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ACID DREAMS

The CIA, LSD and the Sixties Rebellion
by MARTIN A. LEE and BRUCE SHLAIN

Paper $12.95; Grove Press, at bookstores, or use coupon to order.

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the movement, an alliance that sometimes (usually on the West Coast) even became a unity (as in the battle of People's Park in Berkeley in 1969). In the eyes of late-stage political desperadoes such as the Weathermen, this alliance between culture and politics actually established the social conditions necessary for a full-blown if novel revolution in the United States and throughout the Northern Atlantic system we call the West.

Still, as Lee and Shlain's dramatic narrative makes clear, there was terrific tension between the sensibility of acid rock and that of the New Left. Acidrockers sometimes seemed to think their culture was being exploited for purposes they wot not of. Their attempt to assert political control over acidrock culture without becoming in any meaningful sense political in mind, spirit or practice came to a tragic ending at the famous Rolling Stones concert in Altamont, California, in 1969, when fascist thugs called Hell's Angels were actually hired to provide security and succeeded in killing someone and terrorizing the entire crowd. It was a concert, by the way, that became famous for being awash in bad acid, an all-but-universal complaint that was heard that year in the youth culture.

Some acid heads openly preached an anti-political acid rapture exactly evocative of Old Left fears and warnings — self-infatuated, hedonistic, defeatist, mindless. The reality in fact exceeded the fear since we were not confronting a mere metaphor but an actual epidemic of addictive narcosis. Most notable of the theologians of acid was the anointed high priest, Timothy Leary, who began purely scientific experiments with acid as a full Harvard professor of psychology. The authors quote Leary on this point to devastating effect: "Don't vote," brayed the great dope mystic, who would a few years later be sprung from a California prison by the SDS Weatherman faction and would one day run lamely for the governorship of California. "Don't politic. Don't petition. You can't do *anything* about America politically. People should not be allowed to talk politics except on all fours."

"Consciousness raising" was not used in the movement to denote drug-assisted take-offs. As a national officer of SDS, I spoke out spiritedly against drugism at UC Berkeley in 1966, i.e., against the idea, very commonplace and especially commonplace at Berkeley at that time, that getting stoned was a good political thing in and of itself. The theory in brief was that getting stoned heightened the stonee's alienation from mainstream society, and that this alienation would ultimately have

to express itself in terms of political action. This was, as all must now acknowledge, wrong. SDS was saying so up front at the very hour of the hexing.

But movement people, myself included, certainly did trip, and certainly did regard the experience as powerful, important and something to share with one's affinity group. Movement trippers just tried to be clear that the trip to take was a round trip and not one-way. To be out-bound on Owsley's Blue was fine if you had a ticket to ride back. Otherwise, the head candy of the sixties was just a sweeter poison. The movement was not abstemious, but it was not drug-crazed, either, or even drug-infatuated.

The story told by *Acid Dreams* began in 1938 when Dr. Albert Hoffman of Sandoz Laboratories of Basel, Switzerland, first synthesized LSD-25, i.e., the twenty-fifth in a series of derivatives he had concocted of lysergic acid diethylamide, one of many alkaloids of the pharmacologically important fungus, ergot. He was hoping that one of these derivatives might stimulate blood circulation, but animal tests with LSD-25 were not promising, and the vial gathered dust for five years.

But then on April 16, 1943, Hoffman was moved by "a strange feeling that it would be worthwhile to carry out more profound studies with this compound," so he went to the lab to prepare a fresh batch. He spilled some, just a little, and accidentally got a drop on his fingertip. It absorbed through the skin, and the rest was history.

"Right from the start," write Lee and Shlain, "he sensed that LSD could be an important tool for studying how the mind works, and he was pleased when the scientific community began to use the drug for this purpose."

The "scientific community" overlaps, of course, with the national security community, which also likes to "study how the mind works," not because of any disinterested concern for the advancement of human knowledge, of course, but simply in order to penetrate other minds and to protect its own mind from penetration in turn. All spies from the beginning of time seek to find a truth serum, something to put somehow into people's brains to make them incapable of keeping secrets. In the spy's world, the truth serum is the gold at the headwaters of the Rhine. Beyond this, spy labs look for drugs that will render a personality subject to positive external control (e.g., the "Manchurian candidate"). The ability to take people over against their will, to possess specific individuals, is a time-honored aim of ultimate diplomacy and Satanism alike. A drug that was tasteless, odorless, invisible in water, hugely potent in microdoses, deliverable by an endless array of messengers great and small, high tech and low, passive and active, and capable effortlessly of twisting the stiffest, straightest, toughest mind into painted pretzels was a natural for the CIA — and presumably also a natural for all other intelligence agencies that existed then or that were forever to come, world without end. Whatever else it was good or bad for, Dr. Hoffman's little slip had changed the whole game of counter-intelligence.

The military, too, saw a revolutionary potential in LSD and actually set up a project to explore development of a "madness gas" to disorient enemy soldiers and dissolve their will to fight. By the time they come to, they're in reeducation. Well? Was that worse than nuking them out? Were psychochemical weapons not a superior alternative? Unfortunately, realistic assessment of such a hypothetical madness bomb required trying out a variety of chemical agents on unwitting subjects. One of them, Harold Blauer, died an hour after being injected with methyl diamphetamine or MDA, later called "the love drug" on the streets, by doctors working under army contract at the New York State Psychiatric Institute. But not all the government's experiments worked out so poorly, and by the end of the '50s the army had followed the CIA in adopting LSD-25 (or as the army called it, EA-1729) for actual interrogation situations, indeed had published a secret manual establishing technical SOP for its use.

LSD, of course, was not the whole of it with the '60s and that taste for headfood that appeared almost simultaneously among spooks and the nation's white middle classes. The menu was a long one. Write Lee and Shlain:

> ...nearly every drug that appeared on the black market during the 1960s — marijuana, cocaine, heroin, PCP, amyl nitrate, mushrooms, DMT, barbiturates, laughing gas, speed and many others — had previously been scrutinized, tested, and in some cases refined by CIA and army scientists.

Still, as the authors make clear, LSD was king. No other drug, they write:

> received as much attention or was embraced with such enthusiasm as LSD-25. For a time, CIA personnel were completely infatuated with the hallucinogen. Those who first tested LSD in the early 1950s were convinced that it would revolutionize the cloak and dagger trade.

These facts — documented incontrovertibly, not denied, defended only by rightwing zealots and only on grounds of base expediency — undergird the core theme of *Acid Dreams:*

> The central irony of LSD is that it has been used both as a weapon and a sacrament, a mind-control drug and a mind-expanding chemical. Each of these possibilities generated a unique history: a covert history, on the one hand, rooted in CIA and military experimentation with hallucinogens, and a grassroots history of the drug counter-culture that exploded into prominence in the 1960s. At key points the two histories converge and overlap, forming an interface between the CIA's secret drug programs and the rise and fall of the psychedelic movement.

All this gives rise to a somewhat harder question, namely: *To what degree did covert government programs actually bring the acid movement about?* Was acid dropped in the water of the nation's youth by the CIA and the military intelligence arms? I myself did not come to this question with a preferred theory. I could see a reason to avoid being hysterically revisionist about it. Maybe the degree of actual governmental responsibility was very low. Maybe, for example, the discovery of acid exploded throughout an academic elite in the United States (and Europe) starting in the late 1950s and easily propagated from there into the population of ever-experimental college youth, a population that thus became a subculture first and then a counter-culture, quite independently of any prodding from a hypothetical crypto-Nazi cabal at the CIA. There is no reason why things could not have happened that way, or something like.

And yet the single most copious source of American street acid throughout a three-year period around the turn of the decade was Ronald Stark, identified later in an Italian court as a CIA asset from 1960 at latest. As *Acid Dreams* explains, Stark could supply phenomenal amounts of acid; his calling card to Leary was a two-kilo block of LSD-25 in pure crystalline form, enough to stone the whole state of California for a month. Stark could supply acid in such quantities because he had a mysterious East Bloc source of ergotamine tartrate, the crucial manufacturing ingredient, and a state-of-the-art lab in France that apparently operated under CIA protection.

And no less than Leary himself, through whose Harvard laboratory the first American acid tests were run upon an increasingly avid body of student and faculty volunteers, claims explicitly that the acid revolution was the result of plotting by the U.S. intelligence services, that without positive government action the acid phenomenon would never have taken place. As Leary told Lee and Shlain:

> The LSD movement was started by the CIA. I wouldn't be here now without the foresight of the CIA scientists. It was no accident. It was all planned and scripted by the Central Intelligence, and I'm all in favor of Central Intelligence.

We would find it very hard to imagine the '60s without acid. Many who lived throughout the '60s would agree that no single act expressed the period's often joyously rebellious mood *per se* better than did dropping acid with friends, comrades and lovers. Without it, there would have been no "Lucy In the Sky With Diamonds." Without that, the decade would seem as empty as a music film without its soundtrack.

What we have to contemplate nevertheless is the possibility that the great American acid trip, no matter how distinctive of the rebellion of the 1960s it came to appear, was in fact the result of a secret, illegal and despicable government conspiracy against the Constitution, against the American people, and most particularly against American youth of that and succeeding periods.

Second, we have to note that it was not the purpose of this conspiracy to spread joy and mystical insight among us. When I testified for the defense in the trial of the Chicago 8 in 1969, I was, as I have always believed and have said before, dosed with an LSD-like substance. I believe it was put in the water that was served me in the restaurant in the federal district courtroom building in Chicago less than an hour before I took the stand. I believe moreover that the purpose of this, if it did indeed happen, was not to sharpen my mind but to confuse it. If U.S. intelligence bodies collaborated in an effort to drug an entire generation of Americans, then the reason they did so was to disorient it, sedate it and de-politicize it. Are blacks acting up? Give 'em heroin! Are middle class white kids acting up? Give 'em LSD! People who are personally familiar with acid know, of course, that it qualifies as a "truth serum" not in the sense of making you *tell the truth* but in the sense of making you *see the truth*. This is why the drug was ulimately, in my opinion, of no use to covert fascism. Fanatical rightwing counterspies dosed us with what they thought was madness, but their poison only helped us see through their cant and break free of it. But however it ended, the evidence of *Acid Dreams* compels us to assume that the great acid revolution of the '60s was begun as a ruse of the counter-revolution.

"When I testified for the defense in the trial of the Chicago 8 in 1969, I was...dosed with an LSD-like substance."

The administrative entity under which the CIA conducted its in-house work and funded outside protocols such as those of Harvard professors Leary and Richard Alpert (whom the acid experience turned into Baba Ram Dass) was entitled "MK Ultra." What this name means to those cleared to know is not yet revealed. It has the same form as the names of other, dissimilar CIA projects, such as MH Chaos, which was the surveillance of the New Left, or JM Wave, which was one of the attempts to find a contract assassin to kill Castro.

As Lee and Shlain write, MK Ultra was "the principal CIA program involving the development of chemical and biological agents during the Cold War." Run by Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the purpose of MK Ultra was "to investigate whether and how it was possible to modify an individual's behavior by covert means." Gottlieb justified this program by citing intelligence reports that the Soviets and Chicoms were experimenting with LSD in the early 1950s. By 1952, the CIA had recruited a top U.S. narcotics official, George Hunter White, to begin dosing unsuspecting American citizens just to see what they would do. The authors' meticulous examination of 20,000 pages of formerly classified documents uncovered no more amazing a statement than that of White in retirement reflecting back on this experience in a letter to Dr. Gottlieb:

> I was a very minor missionary, actually a heretic, but I toiled wholeheartedly in the vineyards because it was fun, fun, fun. Where else could a red-blooded American boy lie, kill, cheat, steal, rape and pillage with the sanction and blessing of the All-Highest?

Acid Dreams is a brilliantly conceived and gracefully executed piece of historical reconstruction in formerly forbidden spheres of secret government operations. It is a model of the kind of independent, nonacademic, investigative journalism that evolved out of the 1960s' felt need for a level of discourse more politically engaged than that tolerated by the schools and everyday journalism.

It is also a great read as pure narrative. The story of LSD would have been an amazing story in any period, one is bound to think. The mere popularization of access to acid, initially restricted to a narrow elite, was a stupendous event. The discovery that consciousness could be ravished so powerfully and interestingly and at the same time so safely was enough to entice a great many otherwise established intellectuals as different from one another as Aldous Huxley, Herman Kahn and John Lilly, and it could not help but entice the hoi polloi as well. That already is a colossal story. Now set that story in the context of the war in Vietnam, the movement against it, the struggle for civil rights, the rise of an international youth culture and the emergence of an American secret state, and the acid story becomes a kind of epic. *Acid Dreams* is the only book that tells it all. □

Carl Oglesby was elected national president of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1965, and is the author of Containment and Change *(1967),* The New Left Reader *(1969), and* The Yankee and Cowboy War: Conspiracies from Dallas to Watergate *(1976). Currently he is collecting information on the Gehlen Organization and its influence within U.S. intelligence agencies.*

For the Prisoners in South Africa

What squats its vast bulk
at the end of my mind's
shadowy recesses
dominating my thinking like a
legendary bastion, Bastille,
labyrinthinely convoluted
like a basilica upthrust on the
Horn where ages intersect
strong with basilisk-power to
turn my brain to stone
is knowledge of you, thousands,
imprisoned,
(The Fort, Rooi Hel, Pollsmoor, the Island)
and the wound of knowledge
knowledge of my powerlessness.

— Dennis Brutus

The main ranch house at Idylwild was the centre of a 300-acre estate bought by the core of the Brotherhood of Eternal Love

operation — at that time, the world's largest — in jeopardy. With the stash of sunshine quickly dwindling, they were desperate for a new source of acid. It was at this point that Ronald Stark showed up at the ranch in Idyllwild with an offer the Brothers could not refuse.

At first impression, Stark did not inspire much confidence. Five foot eight inches tall, with a bulging waistline, high forehead, and a thick brooding moustache, he could easily come off as a schlepp. But his motley demeanor belied a ruthless and cunning intelligence. Although only in his early thirties, Stark spoke ten languages fluently, including French, German, Italian, Arabic and Chinese. He was, in short, a genius con artist who could talk circles around just about anybody.

After some verbal sparring, Stark proved his sincerity by producing a kilo of pure LSD. This was more acid than any of the Brothers had ever seen in one place. Stark informed them that he had discovered a quick and easy method of making high-quality acid. He played their psyches like piano keys, rapping big raps about turning on the world — not just the West, but the Soviet Union and the Communist countries as well. Stark claimed he had business contacts with the Japanese Mafia who could smuggle drugs into mainland China. He also said he knew a high-placed Tibetan close to the Dalai Lama. Why not offer him enough LSD to dose all the Chinese troops occupying Tibet? "We were definitely very gullible in believing the stuff he told us," one of the Brothers later acknowledged.

For a group of starry-eyed acid evangelists, Stark's appearance in Idyllwild must have seemed like a godsend. He had already manufactured large quantities of LSD at his laboratory in France, and plenty more would follow. The Brotherhood agreed to distribute the drug, which was dyed orange so as to continue the sunshine legacy.

Had the Brothers come down from their LSD reveries long enough to ponder this mysterious newcomer, they might have suspected something was up. Stark's official record leaves ample room for speculation. Born in New York in September 1938 as Ronald Shitsky, at age 24 he was convicted of filing a false application for government service. The FBI tagged him Number 812020E. After violating probation, he landed in federal prison in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. There Shitsky started calling himself Ronald Hadley Clark. By the time he got a job as a researcher at Bellevue mental hospital, Clark had become Stark. His net recorded worth was $3000 in 1967, but a year later he was a millionaire. Stark claimed a relationship to the Whitneys, one of America's richest clans, and attributed his sudden wealth to the deft handling of a family trust fund.

At various times Stark passed himself off as a medical doctor, a chemist, a gourmet cook, a collector of fine art. His talent as a raconteur was enhanced by a insatiable appetite for intrigue and deception. He was adept at dropping names, dates and places that changed depending upon the situation. Every story Stark told was slightly different as he dashed to and fro, attending to various business scams in at least a dozen countries. He maneuvered on four continents, leaving a trail of ambiguities at every turn. A master of innuendo and disinformation, Stark preferred to keep his range of contacts ignorant of each other's activities. Oftentimes he concealed the fact that he was an American. His European associates were not privy to his affairs in Africa, and those in Asia knew little about his work in the States. The Brothers, for example, had no idea that Stark was running a cocaine ring in the Bay Area.

Stark compartmentalized the different spheres of his life, managing everything on a "need to know" basis. In this respect his modus operandi was not unlike that of an intelligence operative. He often claimed he knew lots of spies, and to some of his friends he even boasted of working for the CIA. It was a tip from the Agency, Stark explained, that prompted him to shut down his lab in Paris in 1971.

A few months later Stark opened up another sophisticated production center in Brussels, which masqueraded for a year and a half as a reputable biomedical research firm. During this period he communicated on a regular basis with American embassy officials in London. He even elicited their assistance while setting up his Belgian drug lab. When it was all over, Stark had made twenty kilos of LSD — enough for 50 million doses! It was by far the largest amount of acid to emanate from a single underground source, and most of it was sold in the United States.

In November 1972 a team of agents from the IRS and the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs visited his drug lab in Belgium, but Stark was nowhere to be found. Within a year a Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security would hold public hearings on the Brotherhood of Eternal Love, charging that the coterie of hippie bandits was behind a great LSD conspiracy. By this time federal agents had broken up the Brotherhood ring, arresting over a hundred people. The kingpins of the acid trade, including Stark, were indicted on drug charges.

The fact that Stark was wanted in the U.S. hardly put a damper on his international escapades. He spent much of his

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Stark was also supplying LSD to the Brotherhood when its leaders gave $25,000 to the Weather Underground to spring acid guru Timothy Leary from prison in 1970.

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time in Italy during the mid-1970s, cavorting with Sicilian Mafiosi, secret service officials, and political extremists of the far right and far left. Occasionally he traveled to the Baalbek region of Lebanon, where he negotiated with a Shiite Muslim sect for shiploads of hashish. Stark professed to be a business representative of Imam Moussa Sadr, a powerful Shiite warlord who controlled vast hashish plantations and a private army of a thousand men. The area under his dominion was said to include training camps used by extremist factions of the PLO.

Back in Italy, Stark rented a small apartment in Florence. But he rarely stayed there, preferring the posh hotels of Rome, Milan, Bologna and other cities. By day he carried on as a smooth and successful businessman, dining at the best restaurants in expensive three-piece suits. At night he donned a pair of faded blue jeans and a work shirt and mingled with student radicals.

Moving in leftwing circles was nothing new for Stark. He had a knack for popping up wherever trouble was brewing. An American expatriate remembers bumping into him on the streets of Paris during the peak of the Sorbonne uprising in 1968, when students and workers nearly toppled the Gaullist government. In London Stark frequented the clubs and bars that were hangouts for dissident elements, and he first turned up in Milan during the "hot autumn" of 1969, when massive student demonstrations and labor strikes paralyzed Italy. Stark was also supplying LSD to the Brotherhood when its leaders gave $25,000 to the Weather Underground to spring acid guru Timothy Leary from prison in September 1970.

Whatever game Stark was playing took an abrupt turn in February 1975 when Italian police received an anonymous phone call about a man selling drugs in a hotel in Bologna. A few days later at the Grand Hotel Baglioni they arrested a suspect in possession of 4,600 kilos of marijuana, morphine and cocaine. The suspect carried a British passport bearing the name Terrence W. Abbott. Italian investigators soon discovered that Abbott was actually Ronald Stark. Among his belongings was the key to a safe deposit box in Rome that contained documents on the manufacture of LSD and a synthetic version of cocaine. There was also a vial of a liquid hallucinogen that scientists could not precisely identify.

Other items seized by Italian police included letters from a certain Charles C. Adams written on the letterhead of the American embassy in London. The messages from Adams, U.S. foreign service officer, began with "Dear Ron" and were addressed to Stark's drug laboratory in Brussels, which ceased operating shortly after a team of American agents paid a courtesy call in the fall of 1972.

If Stark's contacts with the U.S. embassy were difficult to fathom, then his association with some of Italy's most notorious terrorists was equally curious. In the spring of 1976, while he was being held in Don Bosco prison in Pisa, Stark befriended Renato Curcio, a top leader of the Red Brigades that had stalked Italy since the early 1970s. Curcio and his cohorts apparently had no idea Stark was an American when they took him into their confidence. As soon as he succeeded in penetrating the Red Brigades — the only American who can claim such a feat — Stark asked prison officials to arrange a meeting with the chief prosecutor of Pisa. He said that Curcio had told him of a plot to assassinate Judge Francesco Coco of Genoa, who was scheduled to preside over a trial of fifty Red Brigades members. There was also talk of abducting a prominent Italian politician in Rome, Stark informed the magistrate.

In June 1976 Judge Coco was murdered, just as Stark predicted. Aldo Moro, five times Italy's premier, may have been the other victim. Stark's name would later surface in connection with the Moro kidnapping and execution.

Transferred to a jail in Bologna, Stark continued to expand his terrorist contats. During this period he received a steady flow of visitors from the British and American consulates. (Curiously, the U.S. government never pressed for his extradition, even though he was wanted on drug charges related to the Brotherhood of Eternal Love conspiracy.) Stark also had frequent meetings with representatives from the Libyan diplomatic corps and he communicated with Italian spy chiefs linked to the neofascist P-2 masonic lodge. He was in direct contact with General Vito Miceli,

who served as head of Italian military intelligence during the early 1970s and was later implicated in a series of coup attempts in Italy. According to the Pike Committee, U.S. ambassador Graham Martin gave $800,000 to Miceli for a propaganda campaign during the 1972 election, despite protests from the CIA station chief that this particular recipient was too closely allied with anti-democratic rightwing elements.

It was quite a juggling act, to be sure, but a judge in Bologna eventually sentenced Stark to 14 years in prison and fined him $60,000 for drug trafficking. At his appeals trial in 1978 Stark changed identities once again, this time passing himself off as "Khouri Ali," a radical Palestinian. In fluent Arabic he spelled out the details of his autobiography, explaining that he belonged to an international terrorist organization headquartered in Lebanon called "Group 14." Stark's appeal failed, and he was sent back to jail. But Italian police took a renewed interest in his case after they captured Enrique Paghera, another terrorist leader who knew Stark. At the time of his arrest Paghera was holding a hand-drawn map of a PLO camp in Lebanon. The map, Paghera confessed, had come from Ronald Stark, who also provided a coded letter of introduction. The objective, according to Paghera, was to forge a link with a terrorist organization that was planning to attack foreign embassies.

In June 1978 Graziano Gori, a magistrate in Bologna, was assigned to investigate Stark's peculiar ties to the U.S., the Arabs, Italian terrorists, and other mysteries. A few weeks later Gori was killed in a car accident. The Italian government subsequently charged Stark with "armed banditry" for his role in aiding and abetting terrorist activities. But he never stood trial on these charges. True to form, Stark dropped out of sight shortly after he was released from prison in April 1979 on orders from Judge Giorgio Floridia in Bologna. The judge's decision was remarkable: he released Stark because of "an impressive series of scrupulously enumerated proofs" that Stark was actually a CIA agent. "Many circumstances suggest that from 1960 onwards Stark belonged to the American secret services," Floridia concluded.

The facts about Ronald Stark raise more questions than they answer. Was he a CIA operative throughout his drug dealing days? Or was the espionage link merely the work of a brilliant confidence trickster who played both ends off the middle to his own advantage? In November 1984 an Italian parliamentary commission issued a lengthy report on domestic terrorism that included a section on "The Case of Ronald Stark." The commission asserted that Stark was an adventurer who was used by the CIA, but proof of when his espionage exploits began is hard to pin down. If Stark was connected to the CIA during the 1960s, as Judge Floridia suggests, then the entire Brotherhood smuggling operation must be reinterpreted. "It could have been that he was employed by an American intelligence agency that wanted to see more psychedelic drugs on the street," a former Brotherhood member stated. "Then again, he might have tricked the CIA, just like he fooled everyone else."

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Was Stark's drug activity tolerated while he passed the CIA information on the youth culture and the radical left?

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The use of LSD among young people in the U.S. reached a peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s, not long after the CIA and other intelligence services initiated a series of covert operations designed to disrupt, discredit and neutralize the New Left, which overlapped in significant ways with the counterculture. Was this merely a historical coincidence or did the CIA actually take steps to promote the illicit acid trade through Ronald Stark, the world's biggest supplier? When did the CIA learn of Stark's role as a drug dealer, and was his activity tolerated while he passed information on the youth culture and the radical left in various countries to the Agency?

The long history of CIA involvement in trafficking heroin from Southeast Asia lends credence to the possibility that U.S. intelligence operatives may have dabbled in black market LSD as well. The CIA had been experimenting with acid as a mind control weapon since the early 1950s. But LSD is not habit-forming like heroin, and its efficacy as an instrument of social control seems rather tenuous in light of the wide range of reactions induced by the hallucinogen.

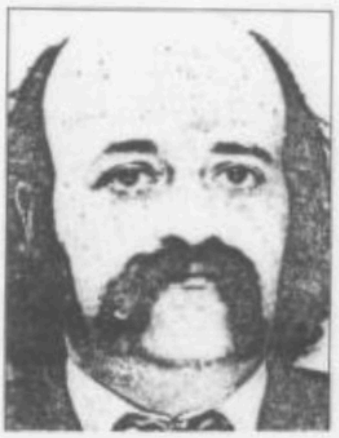
Although there is no proof that the CIA got involved in promoting street acid as a matter of policy, it's not at all certain that stopping the flow of illicit LSD was a particular priority either. Perhaps the best explanation is that CIA officials were willing to condone Stark's exploits in the drug trade as long as he functioned as an informant.

Stark's name surfaced once again in 1982 when he was arrested in Holland for trafficking hashish, cocaine and heroin. The following year he was deported without fanfare to the U.S., where charges were still pending for his role in the Brotherhood of Eternal Love conspiracy. The entire matter was handled so discreetly that the U.S. press never learned of his return. Stark spent a few months preparing his own legal defense in a San Francisco jail until charges were dropped by the Justice Department, which claimed too many years had passed to prosecute the case. In December 1984 Stark died of a heart attack, leaving others to ponder the ambiguous legacy of the man who pumped millions of hits of acid into the willing arteries of the counterculture.

Ronald Stark thrived in a clandestine netherworld where "facts are wiped out by artifacts," as Norman Mailer wrote of the espionage metaphysic, and "every truth is obliged to live in its denial." Above all, he remains an extraordinary international enigma. "A genius, but a tortured soul" is how one Italian magistrate described him. Even if Stark was never more than a brilliant private operator, his remarkable career illustrates the tangled web of espionage, crime, and extremist politics that are so much a part of the secret history of LSD. □

Martin A. Lee is the editor of Extra! *and the co-author of* Acid Dreams, *both of which are described more fully in this issue.*

The many faces of Ronald Stark: the youthful Stark, the disguised Stark in a false British passport and the middle-aged Stark arrested in Italy in 1975



WE WEREN'T *ENTIRELY* PARANOID

The oddly invisible rise of authoritarianism, as seen by the alternative press and ignored by the mainstream media.

BY CHIP BERLET

The mainstream media are treating the news of CIA complicity in Panamanian Manuel Noriega's drug-dealing as if it were a shocking aberration. Don't these journalists own a library card?

Fifteen years ago, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* by Alfred W. McCoy (Harper Colophon, 1973) provided meticulous documentation of the connection between anti-communist foreign policy objectives, U.S. intelligence-service intrigues, and the flow of heroin into the ruptured veins of addicted Americans.

FBI spying on the anti-intervention group CISPES (the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador) has been revealed over the past two years by both the Center for Investigative Reporting and the Center for Constitutional Rights. The list of those targeted grew to encompass hundreds of groups and thousands of individuals. Yet the mainstream media has treated the incident as a novelty. Frank J. Donner's *The Age of Surveillance* (Knopf, 1981) is a virtual encyclopedia of the FBI's 40-year history of unconstitutional attacks on dissidents. It is one of perhaps another dozen books on the same subject. Why the short institutional memory? Is this selective perception? Hmmmmm....

The late 1960's saw the underground press in America begin to chronicle the rise of authoritarianism in the United States. I was one of the many alternative journalists back then writing about intelligence-agency abuses, human rights violations, and the erosion of civil liberties. We were usually dismissed as bitter paranoids ... probably communists ... of suspect sexuality.

To be sure, we had our flaws. We tossed the word "fascism" around rather too lightly. And the arrogance of our calling a dissident press "underground" seems, in retrospect, smug and self-righteous. (In more seriously repressive societies, clandestine journalists of the truly underground press risk their freedom, or even their lives, to get out their newspapers and fliers.) Yet we were onto something, and our basic premise was correct. You see, we had this theory....

We had come to believe that since the end of World War II, paranoid anti-Communism had been the stimulus for covert action abroad, and had led to obsessive governmental secrecy, surveillance, and repression at home. One consequence of this was that sectors of the U.S. government had forged alliances with reactionary, anti-democratic political groups and movements, both domestic and foreign, which not only made it easy to carry out attacks on progressive forces (like us), but also helped to shape an overwhelming public consensus for trading civil liberties for illusory "national security" safeguards. As a basic premise, it ain't half bad. Of course, it's a very depressing view. We were very depressed at the time.

Many of us in the underground press saw ourselves as a solvent dissolving the cement of lies by which the Nixon administration was trying to hold U.S. society together for what we expected would be a final plunge into open fascism. We didn't think the odds were that great that things would get better before they got worse. No doubt we were fairly hysterical and hyperbolic at times. Yet some of the stories appearing in the underground press that were denounced at the time as paranoid ravings were later to appear in the respectable press as the "startling revelations" that led to the resignation of Nixon. The role of the underground press in alerting the public to the real situation in Vietnam, the erosion of civil liberties, CIA covert action, FBI spying, and a dozen other topics, has been generally ignored by historians and mainstream journalists alike.

I remember the sneers when in September of 1973 I wrote a two-part article in Washington, D.C.'s *The Daily Rag* (a weekly, of course) detailing allegations that the Teamsters Union had paid cash to a secret Nixon slush fund as part of a deal involving a pardon for Hoffa and the restriction against his running for union office. I had audio tapes, sworn depositions, court records, a zillion interviews, and had even cross-checked the allegations with my very own secondary source on the Watergate Committee. (Every journalist in D.C. had one, since the committee leaked like a sieve; my source had gone to school with another alternative journalist.) The only attention the Teamster article got me was someone's breaking into my apartment and yanking my fuses, and my primary source's fleeing in hysteria after someone re-wired his car's ignition. A few months later I was watching the story on ABC news. Oh, well.

The story of how the CIA's role in smuggling heroin out of Southeast Asia came to reach print also involves the underground press. In February of 1971, the College Press Service and its now-defunct parent group, the United States Student Press Association (USSPA) held its annual conference, this time in Hollywood, California. One of the workshops was led by Michael Aldrich, "Professor of Psychedelics" at the California Institute of the Arts. Aldrich told

the assembled editors about research he and Allen Ginsberg had conducted showing links between the CIA, the Saigon regime, and the opium-smuggling of Meo tribespeople in Laos.

Ginsberg, the Beat poet, had gotten a first premonition of the story while sorting through his massive file of newspaper clippings. He found that when read chronologically, clippings reporting that U.S. and South Vietnamese forces controlled the Golden Triangle opium-growing region in Southeast Asia were followed a few months later by others detailing a significant rise in the number of heroin-overdose deaths in U.S. cities.

I attended Aldrich's session and along with several other college and underground editors put together enough money to purchase one-time reprint rights to Aldrich's manuscript, a much-corrected single-spaced document bearing the letterhead *The Marijuana Review*. We agreed to print an edited version in early March, and my college newspaper, *The Denver Clarion*, became the first U.S. publication to run a documented story about the CIA-heroin connection. Hooray! Well, we thought that was pretty nifty.

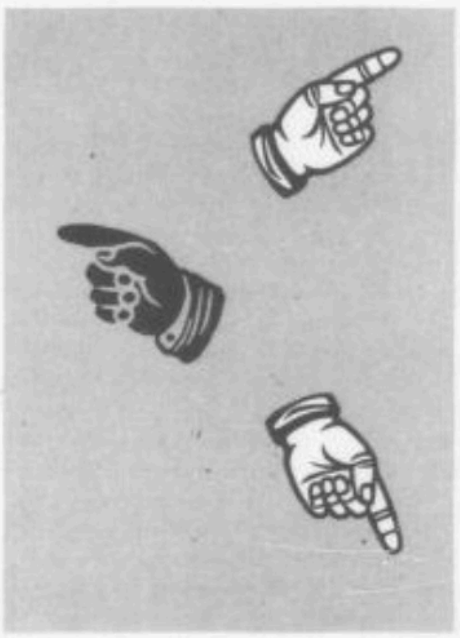
At the time, I was also working with the College Press Service, and one night at the Hollywood conference I sat down with Aldrich, Carl Nelson, and Barry Holtzclaw of CPS, and former CPS writer Frank Browning who at that time was an editor at *Ramparts* magazine. (Browning now reports for "All Things Considered" on National Public Radio.) Talk turned to the Aldrich story. The CPS editors were hot to run a version of the story, if some information holes could be filled in. Browning suggested that *Ramparts* research the story and that CPS wait and release the text of the *Ramparts* article timed to coincide with the magazine's hitting the newsstands. An agreement was struck, and Browning enlisted Banning Garret of the Pacific Studies Center to co-author the piece.

The May 1971 issue of *Ramparts* featured the story on its cover with the headline: "Marshal Ky: The Biggest Pusher in the World." CPS mailed out the text one week before the magazine was released, and told its subscribers that "news of the story has already stirred considerable interest among Capitol Hill doves, and both Sen. George McGovern and Rep. Ronald Dellums say they will announce it in press conferences at the end of this week and press for hearings on the issues raised in their respective houses of Congress. In light of President Nixon's claims for a new world-wide effort to fight the international drug trade, the revelations in this story easily point out U.S. hypocrisy."

The story was a well-documented blockbuster, but the straight press virtually ignored it. There were a few column inches about Congressional hearings being called for, and then the story vanished for months — until Senator Albert Gruening of Alaska opened hearings. Suddenly the story was "discovered" by the *Washington Post* and NBC news. After the hearings were over, however, the story received continued coverage only through alternative sources.

Professor Peter Dale Scott, who had provided material on Laos and the China lobby for the *Ramparts* article, also authored his own piece in *Earth* magazine in early 1972. The alternative Dispatch News Service International, which broke the story of the My Lai massacre, ran follow-up articles on the CIA-heroin connection by T.D. Allman and D. Gareth Porter, who also wrote for CPS from Vietnam. Another Dispatch freelancer, John Everingham, served as a photographer and guide to McCoy while he researched his book. Sadly, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* — despite its seventy pages of footnotes, other documentation, photographs, and first-hand accounts — was soon out of print, and the CIA was off trading guns for drugs in another part of the globe.

The CIA-heroin story did, however, add one more straw to the bundle of revelations that eventually broke the back of public support for the U.S. role in southeast Asia. For example, just before publication, CPS editor Carl Nelson took a copy of the story to his father to see what his reaction would be. His father was Deputy Assistant Director of the CIA. Carl reported that his father, given the CIA's compartmentalization of information, appeared genuinely astounded by the story, and at first didn't believe a word of it.



Another example of an underground press scoop was the Louis Tackwood story. Tackwood, an undercover agent and informer for the Los Angeles Police Department, had flipped out and revealed to a group of alternative writers some details about a plot to disrupt the San Diego Republican Convention in 1972 and blame it on radical groups. The conspirators planned to use the event to legitimize repression against leftists and gain sympathy for Nixon and other conservative politicians.

Unbeknownst to the alternative press, it had stumbled onto the first evidence of the "dirty tricks" campaign being orchestrated out of the White House, and indeed of a broader picture of domestic counterintelligence operations.

Alternative Features Service covered the breaking story on the West Coast in October of 1971, and rushed a release into the mail. Recognizing the importance of the story, AFS phoned their subscribers, including the Denver underground *Chinook*, which alerted College Press Service upstairs in the same building. *Chinook* and CPS decided to cooperate in further researching the story. After a quick briefing from AFS, CPS patched into a live press conference with Tackwood on the coast through a hook-up with a Pacifica radio station in Houston.

Meanwhile, CPS's Carl Nelson in Washington was collecting vehement denials from various government officials. Nelson also slipped into the *Washington Post* with the help of a friend in the newsroom, and he read the *Post* article on Tackwood over the phone to CPS in Denver.

Working all night, CPS and *Chinook* writers managed to piece together a lengthy story. I condensed the article for CPS and we had a release in the mail by the following morning. Then we moved over to a local typesetting collective and with some help from a sympathetic *Denver Post* editor, *Chinook* staffers re-wrote the story for a special edition. We missed our press deadline and the printers called to say they were going home; after a few minutes of negotiations on the price of the bribe, the printers agreed to stay near the presses, and *Chinook* hit the streets with the first version of the story to appear in print. We even beat the *Washington Post*.

Most mainstream media reported the story by stressing denials. Yet the *Chicago Journalism Review* praised both CPS and AFS for their handling of the story, and noted that the two alternative services "acted truer to the tenets of good journalism than most established services."

While the muckraking influence of the underground and alternative press has to some degree spread to the mainstream media, there is still a chronic lack of contextual reporting.

In 1980, after five years of researching and writing articles about perennial Presidential contender Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., I joined two other alternative journalists, Dennis King and Russ Bellant, at a press conference in Washington, D.C.

Having concluded that our stories calling LaRouche a neo-fascist cult leader hadn't sparked any sustained interest on the part of the mass media, we produced evidence that the LaRouche network was a $10-million-per-year operation that was potentially violating laws governing fundraising, financial operations, and taxes. Despite the sensational nature of our charges, not one major media outlet reported the story.

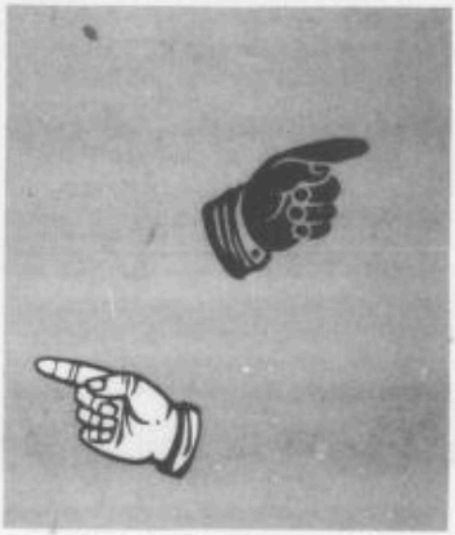
In October 1986 the mass media finally discovered the LaRouche financial story — following the indictment of ten top LaRouche lieutenants. The charges stemmed from a federal investigation into the same type of financial irregularities we had cited in our press conference six years earlier. Many newspapers noted with irony that on the same day the indictments were revealed, the Supreme Court refused to hear arguments stemming from a LaRouche slander lawsuit filed against several NBC television reporters, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, Dennis King, and myself.

A few newspapers made the connection, but most still failed to mention what the NBC lawsuit case involved: a federal jury decision that NBC had not slandered LaRouche by airing charges that he ran a financial empire that appeared to be operating illegally. The broadcast had also alleged that LaRouche was a "small-time Hitler," who headed a thuggish anti-Semitic cult. That these small details would have significantly expanded the depth of the main story did not seem to occur to most reporters. As for LaRouche's ideology, most reporters were stumped. Some even applied the monumentally inaccurate term "extremist conservative" to this man, who in many ways represents the antithesis of political conservatism.

There is a distinctively American school of reporting — unconnected, ahistorical, anti-ideological ... history and news covered as a sporting event.

"Iranians bomb 3 ships but navy sinks 2 gunboats ... pix at eleven."

There is never time to explain why.



Everything is random events on the toteboard of history. In his recent book *Inventing Reality* (St. Martin's Press, 1986), Michael Parenti regales us with scores of examples of this phenomenon, and offers an explanation.

Parenti sees in the American media a "tendency to favor personality over issue, event over content, official positions over popular grievances, the atypical and sensational over the modal and systematic."

These failings are analyzed in chapters detailing how television network news and several major daily newspapers chose to cover certain types of stories. The jaunty titles show the breadth of the critique: "The Big Sell; Giving Labor the Business; The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Collapsing; Soviet Terrorists, Bulgarian Pope Killers, and Other Big Lies; Doing the Third World; Variations on a Theme for Counterrevolution."

Parenti argues that these persistent media failures, when taken in the aggregate, serve as a conscious reification of the political and social status quo in America. A conservative force rather than a liberal one.

Parenti's examples persuasively buttress his contention that the mass media "exert a subtle, persistent influence in defining the scope of respectable political discourse, channeling public attention in directions that are essentially supportive of the existing politico-economic system."

In his acknowledgments, Parenti notes the influence on his work of journalist George Seldes, an early mass-media critic whose books occupy several feet of shelf space over my own desk. Seldes gained fame in the 1930's and 1940's by scolding reporters for suppressing information about authoritarian or fascist sympathies among corporate and political leaders in America — even during World War II. Last year, seeking to understand these issues better, I visited Seldes with a briefcase full of LaRouche's writings. Clearly a "Mussolini-style fascist," agreed Seldes, but why the mass media still seemed unwilling or unable to report accurately on right-wing ideologues left us stumped. Seldes contended that since his newsletter *In Fact* ceased publication in the early 1950's, the mass media had grown far more professional and less willing to be overtly manipulated into suppressing the news. He felt his theories of heavy-handed corporate and government interference and influence no longer provided an adequate explanation for what he saw as a continued media bias favoring the political status quo. The influences and biases of today seem far more subtle to Seldes.

Parenti's book addresses that issue by showing how even subtle pressures, if pervasive enough, can have the same effect. "What is it about the dynamics of news-gathering and the foibles of reporters that obliges the press to treat capitalism as a benign system and socialism as a pernicious one?" asks Parenti. "Not much. But there is plenty to explain that bias in the pattern of ownership and control, the vested class interest, the financial muscle of the big advertisers, and the entire capitalist social and cultural order."

Parenti does have a one-track mind on this question, and there are undoubtedly other reasons that deserve to be considered, especially in the case of network television. For instance, one structural bar to intelligent reporting on TV is the segmented commercial market system that financially supports news broadcasts. You can't sell deodorant if viewers are bummed out by reality. But the bottom line is the same. Happy talk. There are rare and noble exceptions, such as *Frontline* on PBS and anything by Bill Moyers, but they are not where most Americans get their news. This carping does have a point, which was best articulated by James Madison, number four on the charts as President of the United States:

"A popular government, without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power that knowledge gives."

A tragic farce? Sounds right to me. Now let's figure out what to do about it. □

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